

While contemporary theory challenges whether there even is a real, "landscape" stubbornly maintains its own privileged status as a pre-given reality. Few designers acknowledge that the representation of nature is a necessary aspect of its construction in any kind of landscape. Yves Brunier embraced this constitutive paradox, both in his design techniques and in his projects. His images explore and represent a nature that is both spatial experience and aesthetic object, displaced from other times and places. These images exceed by far the sum of their parts, not only in their beauty, economy, and legibility, but in the lack of purity that allows the materials of a project to coalesce within and through them, to form new spaces.



Modern landscape has been notoriously resistant to representation, dominated by a naturalistic approach whose primary purpose is to maintain the fiction of nature's wholeness. Emblematic of this wholeness is landscape's smooth surface, whose apparent self-evidence serves to render its meaning invisible and hence inaccessible to criticism. This smooth surface first emerged in late eighteenth-century England in the landscape gardens of Lancelot "Capability" Brown. These pastoral creations with their gently undulating lawns established the enduring paradigm of landscape. Its timeless appearance—supposedly bearing no trace of "the hand of man"—was instrumental in framing a landscape's new bourgeois owners as having always "naturally" been there. This framing masked the historical identity of the land, even when entire villages were removed to make way for a new landscape.

While the landscape garden was enthusiastically received in North America, its naturalistic aesthetic did not translate well to French soil. There, concurrent with Brown's practice,

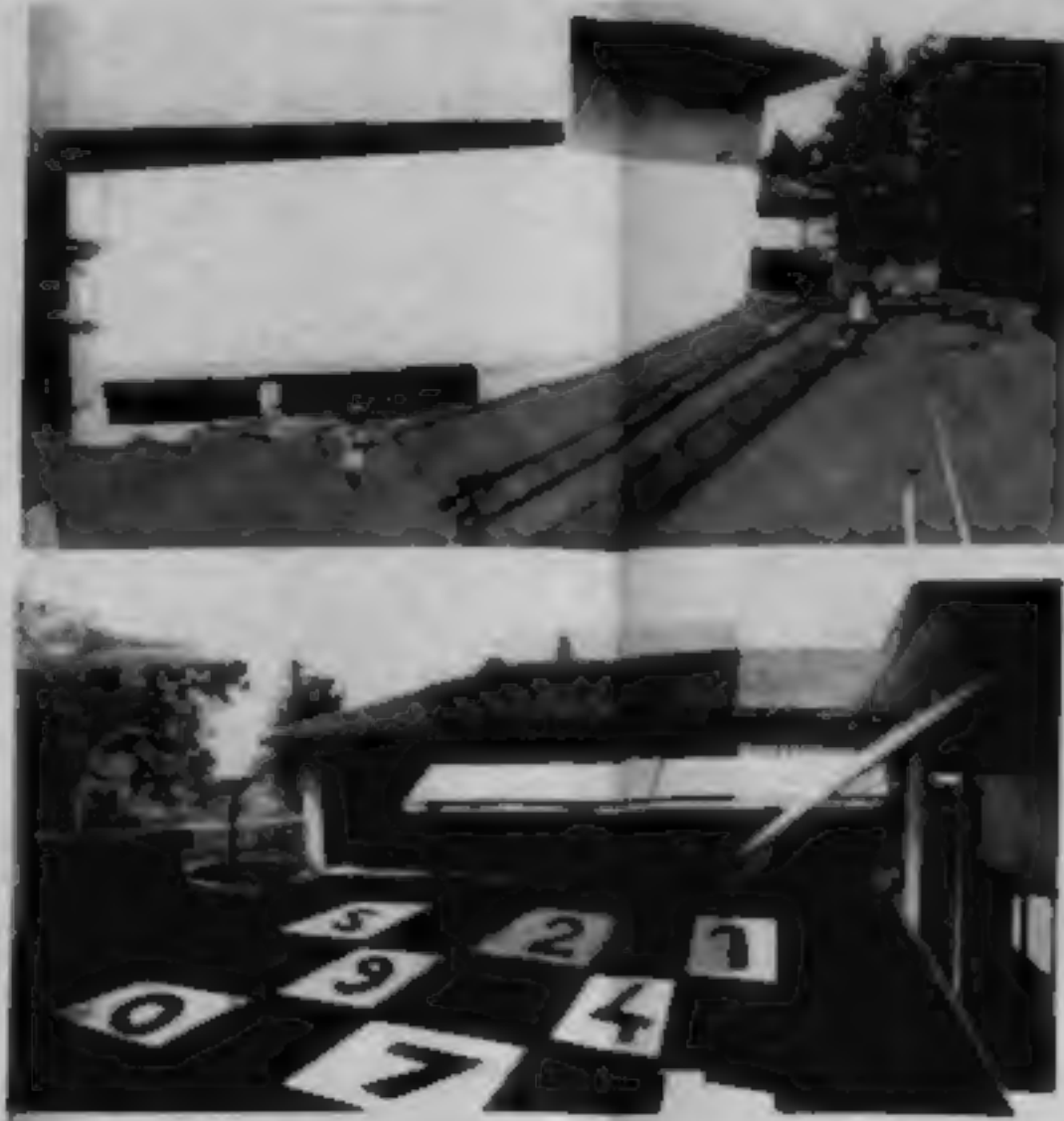


designers and theorists developed the French picturesque garden. Their approach wedded an emphasis on spatial experience with a theatrical approach to the construction of nature's effects. Brunier's designs recall this approach, about which Carmontelle wrote in (ca.) 1800: "Our gardens should transport us through the scenes of an Opera, we should create the illusion of a reality."¹ Projects of Brunier such as Museum Park (Rotterdam, 1989-93)

architect, Rem Koolhaas/OMA; park completed by Petra Blaisse following Brunier's death) and the Institute of Tourism (architect, Jean Nouvel) disrupt landscape's taken-for-granted image-reality. In each design, an oscillation between an general and a detailed reading unmask a naturalizing effect.

By beginning with fragments of already-worked-on material, Brunier's work achieves an abstraction that is not opposed to social or physical context, and that is not a triumph of the ideal over nature but a "passion to remake the object."² It allows representation—both in and by architecture—to engage social and aesthetic spheres simultaneously, with, therefore, the capacity to address space in productive terms. To conceive of nature in terms of fragment and fragment as constituent of a mode of figuration, circumvents the habitual desire to break the world down into neat dichotomies of artificial and natural, form and matter, represented and real. A person who can no longer take for granted nature's wholeness is free to perceive it as both constructed and broken, and engaged in multiple local and concrete relationships. While the fragment as a metaphor often signifies the disintegration of a previously intact formal system, the artist Robert Smithson's idea of "a fragment of a greater fragmentation" frees the fragment from the whole to allow a shift towards more provisional figures, in their possible interrelationships. This idea helps to interpret Brunier's gardens, where each element is a piece of a world in simultaneous growth and disintegration, where all construction is re-construction.

Brunier's approach to the representation of nature recalls Michel Foucault's observation that the garden is the "smallest fragment of the world [that] at the same time represents its totality..." juxtaposing "in a single real place a series of places alien to each other."³ In all of Brunier's work, architecture and landscape architecture share the operation of moving matter around. At Museum Park, the white gravel "beach" of the Orchard, and the anomalous, alien species of black bamboo breaking through the asphalt podium are elements of nature that have become figured by a disruption of conventional syntax. Each of these elements, by being displaced from another time or space, fosters instabilities in everyday space.



These instabilities interact to produce an "other" space, an oscillating field of relationships that calls into question our ways of looking at nature and culture.

The operation of figuration through displacement offers a positive key to the representation of nature in the visibly unnatural context of everyday sites, where it is by definition out of place. A natural artifact within a constructed setting operates to draw the site into a relation with an other reality, that the observer must construct on his or her own. This approach supports the representation of nature in the city, where the "presence of something... matter, a community, a relief, vegetation, the sky, the earth, forces the architect into encroaching into taking pieces off and adding new ones, never making anything from one piece of cloth and in one go."⁴

The smaller a fragment is, the more vulnerable it becomes. Brunier acknowledges this vulnerability as one of nature's contradictory properties, writing that "the exotic is born of combinations and associations of plant families, from utilizing the evocative and the imaginative familiar but strange plants, compelling aesthetics, a kind of softness and fragility that changes perceptions."⁵ He describes the site for Museum Park in Rotterdam as a place that is "direct, stretched out, charming, fragile, half-abandoned or partially used, and also the support for a park project."⁶ His nature is abundant, riotous, unstable, but also carefully cared for. What Rem Koolhaas interprets as his violence against nature (see Interview, facing page) is perhaps a violence against ideologies that cast nature as inherently pure and good, and therefore disallow "man" to touch "her." Brunier leaves nothing untouched in his images: nature is torn, cut, and painted over, and still remains, and/or becomes, emphatically present. This absence of deference in his willingness to layer over nature, and to layer different natures on top of each other, can be interpreted in terms of a hybridization of techniques of collage and drawing with techniques of painting and building. Like his collages, the spaces themselves are constituted by fragments of many evocative, sparkling, brightly-colored realities.



Brunier's use of collage as a poetic procedure, in particular his technique of drawing or painting on top of a photograph, suggests the influence of the Surrealist artist Max Ernst (1891-1971). Ernst introduced the technique of overpaint in the early 1920s, as a means to register tensions between opposing values, ideas and conditions, on disparate layers of the same stratified image. In The Garden of France, in overpainting from 1962, Ernst placed at the center a female figure, cut out from a copy of "The Birth of Venus," a famous nineteenth-century salon painting. The figure is emerging from a multi-layered landscape: banded surfaces of color celebrate the fruitful land, while two rivers flow in opposite directions around her. The painting's simultaneous suggestion of a plan and a three-dimensional reading, the preoccupation with texture, and the contradictory erotic and placid associations of elements, are themes that also reverberate in Brunier's production.

Brunier's assemblages differ from Ernst's in their objective, in that each image concentrates qualities of a specific proposal. The transformation of meaning of a photograph, through overpainting parallels the design procedures that shift the meaning of the site itself. In both cases, his materials are fragments of the environment, each one a constitutive element with the capacity to be transformed.

Brunier's collage techniques support and emphasize the construction of the ground. His representation of a ground as always already constructed, allows not only for the potential disruption of a surface, but also, more radically, the lack of primacy of any single surface. Nothing is taken for granted as background, each surface is a figure-in-itself, that simultaneously holds fragments together and is constituted by them. As his sketches reveal, anything can become a ground—an assembly of hundreds of chairs, a field of sunflowers, or fragments of colored material.

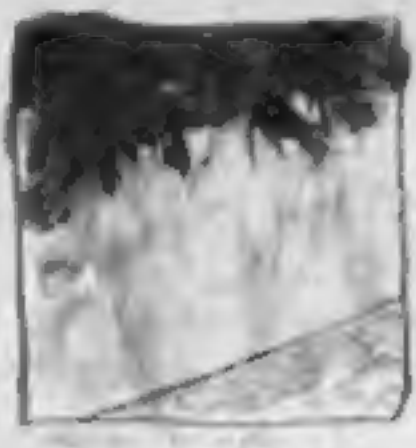
The materials through which grounds are constructed vary widely. In Zone I of Museum Park, the white beach extends horizontally into the infinite space of the mirrored wall and vertically up the trunks of apple and poplar trees. The social space of Zone 2—according to Brunier, part vacant lot, part teatro fantástico—is a sturdy asphalt podium broken and activated by diverse nature-events. Mineral meets vegetal in the ground of Zone 3, responding to the conflict of falling leaves with a confetti of scattered brightly-colored bricks, a field dense with flowers, and an artificial river made of stones interspersed with sparkling glass balls. The fourth zone is a terrace of hard and soft surfaces that enters the museum, and winds its way up to a rooftop garden. As Brunier paints out, a walk through these different strata of the park produces sensations of extreme variety.

A representation of the project for a memorial at Waterloo (Belgium, 1989, with Isabelle Auricoste) describes the ground as a bumpy quilt, registering the irregular topography and the patchwork of agricultural fields, and at the same time critiquing the practice of building a monument to memorialize those fallen in battle. For the Autoroutes de Sud (Vienne, 1989, project assistant to Jean Nouvel), the ground was to be a blue intertwining of textiles, rocks, and glass. Another surreal ground introduces the restaurant of the St. James hotel, designed by Jean Nouvel (1987), where swollen orange pumpkins inhabit a



surface of crushed red bricks, in front of the rust-colored buildings. The glass bubble of the "Ice Cube" fountain-skyline melts a virtual hole in the groundplane of the Place du Général-Leclerc in Tours (1989, with Jean Nouvel), at Euralille (1989, with OMA/Rem Koolhaas) the ground of the park assumes the form of a mountain—a "hub of contrasts" that gathers the diverse scales of urban energies around it.

Brunier landscapes are made up of overlapping layers of space. Sometimes these layers include multiple groundplanes, as in the bridge and the ramp at Museum Park. More often, they correspond to the growth habits and spatial properties of plant materials, that Brunier juxtaposes with each other and with inorganic elements in subtle and not so subtle combinations of position, scale, and color. His pencil and watercolor sketches detail encounters between heterogeneous elements, such as the formation of a space by a fringe of intensely-colored overhanging leaves above and a reflective groundplane below. As with the ground, the figuration of plant materials attains a high degree of specificity in each project.



The planting plan of the Romantic Garden is a wildly exuberant painting of red, yellow, green, blue, and orange, comprising over fifty species, for this part of Museum Park alone. As accompanying collages indicate, each season lays down another set of colors. The importance of plants is also evident in his statement that the park at Euralille "should not merely reflect good urban strategy with its distribution of masses and surfaces...[but also] the fact that a different world has been created based on the differentiation of constantly surprising living plant matter."⁸ Evocative descriptions of plants accompany the drawings and elaborate plant lists for each project, moving from the "delicate" to the "vaporous," to "confetti patches—a reddening island, a fan of greenery—a wave of color..." At a restaurant (that puts) dishes together like colorful paintings, Brunier designs a garden that allows "existing romantic plants [to become] electrified by their relationships with new colors [including] fluorescent rows of white brambles."⁹



In discussing the possibility for a radical experience of landscape space, Robert Smithson pointed out that "[w]hat we take to be the most concrete...often turns into a concatenation of the unexpected. Any order can be reordered." Brunier's too brief practice recalls Smithson's own, both in his unselfish collaboration with "chance and change in the material order of nature,"¹⁰ and in its potential to have a lasting impact on how we understand the representation of built environments. It not only disrupts established meanings, but brings past and present together in new constellations, to allow for the possibility of new constructions in relation to physical and social structures in the world.

Linda Pollak

notes

Please see projects listed on the facing page for their collaborative circumstances.

1. L. Carmontelle, quoted in Dora Weinbren, *The Picturesque Garden in France*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 97.
2. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995, p. 11.
3. Robert Smithson, quoted in Carol Hall, "Environmental Artists: Sources and Directions," *Art in the Land*, edited by A. Sonfist, New York: E. P. Dutton Inc., 1983, p. 50.
4. Michel Foucault, "Other Spaces," *Latin International* 48/49, (1986).
5. Sylviane Agacinski, "Sewing Machine Building Monumentality," *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, edited by Peter Osborne and Andrew Benjamin, London: ICA, 1991, p. 215.
6. Yves Brunier landscape architect, editor Michel Jacques, *arc en rêve centre d'architecture / Birkhäuser* 1998, p. 106.
7. Ibid., p. 106.
8. Ibid., p. 114.
9. Ibid., p. 100.
10. Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, p. 117-137.

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A Conversation with Rem Koolhaas

Odile Fillon: People say Yves Brunier was somebody out-of-the-ordinary.

Rem Koolhaas: It was Michel Corajoud who encouraged Yves Brunier to join OMA. He introduced him to me as one of his most gifted students. Oddly enough, when Yves Brunier first arrived at OMA—he was about 24—he refused to take part in any landscape architecture project...because at the time he wanted to be an architect. He leveled a basic criticism at landscape architecture: he spoke out against its dubious aestheticism, its formalism, and its soft quality. He was after an involvement that was more direct, more head on, and more brutal. He set himself up in the main room, and after a certain period of time I got the feeling that he was releasing a more intense kind of energy than other people. When I asked him why he worked with such vigor and fervor and passion, he told me that he didn't want to waste time.

But you did manage to persuade him to become involved in landscaping work.

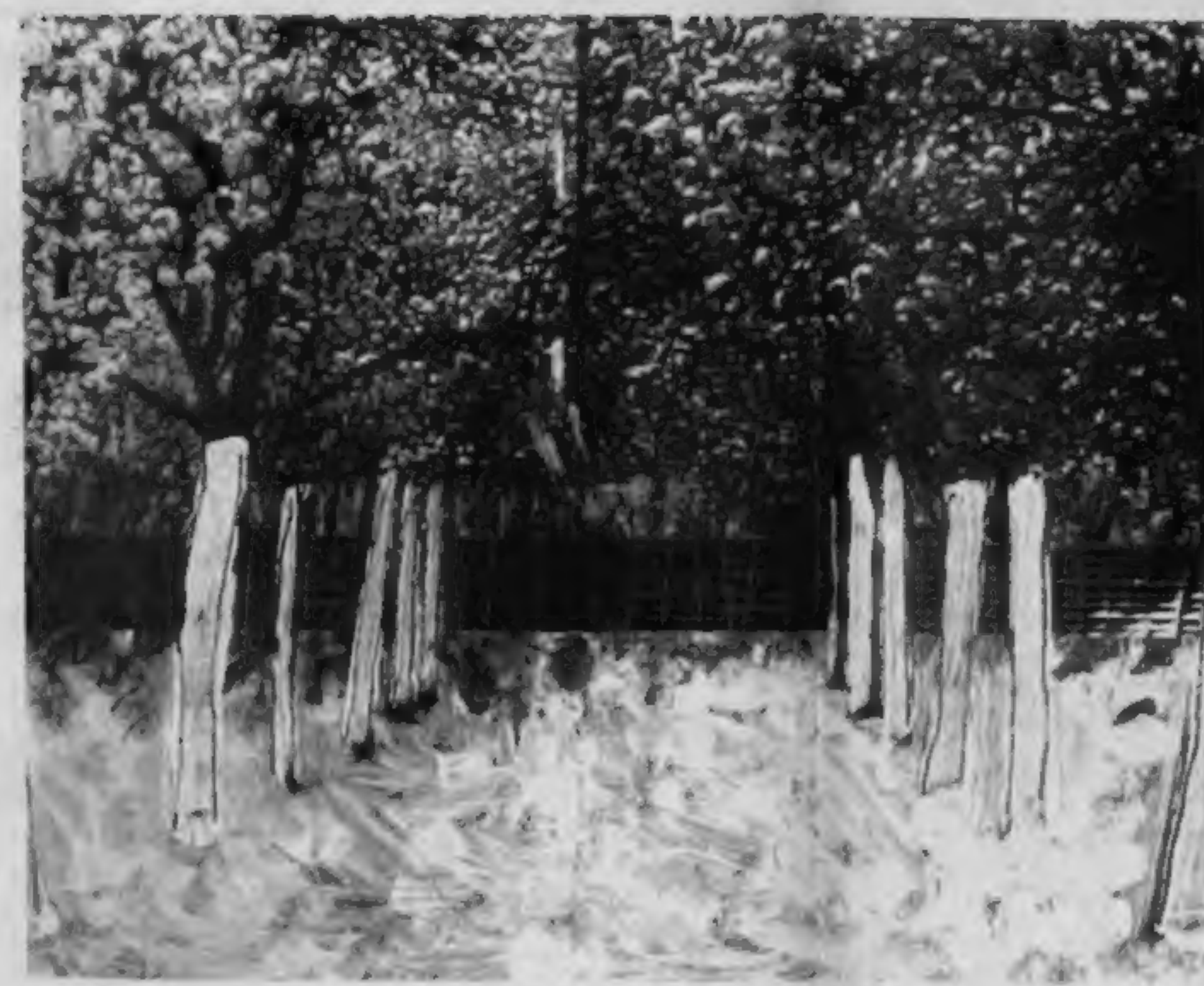
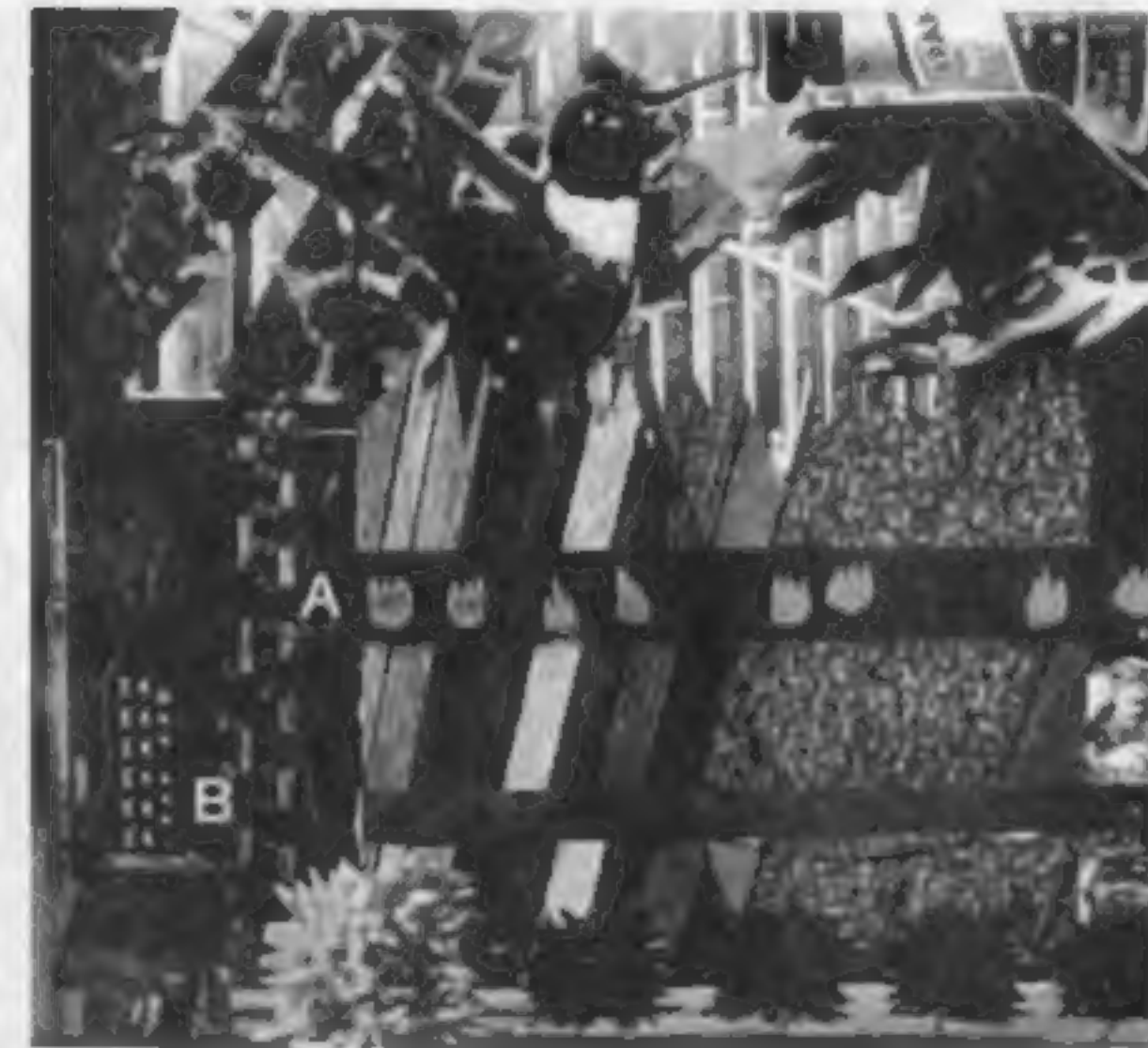
RK: At the La Villette competition, we discovered the programmatic potential of landscape, and so I explained to him that, personally, I didn't find architecture particularly interesting, but that, on the contrary, landscape represented an incredible potential. After much negotiation, he agreed to work on landscape again. I realized then that his relationship with nature was invariably aggressive, as if he wanted to rape nature, strip her of her natural character, and turn her into an expressionist object. For example, he was always keen to paint trees...

In doing so, did he refer to land-art artists?

RK: I don't think so. Yves was actually involved in hybrid projects where, more and more, landscape played a key role, like a sort of medium for regulating town-planning. Rather than playing a decorative, compensatory role, landscape asserted a function of complementarity and intervention.

Is it possible to pick out Yves Brunier's input in these projects?

RK: Whether it be for Melun-Sénart or for Bijlmermeer, they were always group projects. OMA operates like an ongoing workshop, and except through his drawings, it's hard to know how he managed to influence these projects. I remember seeing him at work on the Melun-Sénart maquette. He seemed to be preparing something delicious, at great speed—like a meal in 10 seconds. He took everything that was on the table, and incorporated it in the maquette, as if this very determination to put things together itself generated the logic of the decision.



When did he finally accept that he was just a "landscape architect"?

RK: After his time at OMA, he went back to Paris to pursue his architectural studies. Then he came back to see us. By then his illness was already showing itself, and I told him in no uncertain terms to drop architecture. Yves was a real phenomenon, a typical 1980's person, who was involved at a very young age in intense professional pressures...and with AIDS. His future was landscape, and it was a matter of time. From then on everything became landscape for him. It was like a kind of love affair, but he only owned up to it after three or four years. This comes through very clearly in that collage between the two towers of Haarlemmermeer. Landscape architecture then had nothing more to do with plants. It was the residual condition between objects, between greenhouses and infrastructures. Landscape merged every kind of bond, as if nature was not enough in itself. But maybe this attitude had to do with his illness, which served only to diminish the respect he might have had for nature.

Was he aware that he was breaking new ground?

RK: Yves was a man of few words. He expressed his ideas in the form of drawings and collages tossed off wordlessly. They always contained an element of violence, aggression, and unbelievable impatience. The most significant thing for me was the fact that his knowledge of nature helped me to confirm the hunch I had about the change of route under way about the fact that landscape was in the process of becoming the only medium capable of establishing connections in the city. These hypotheses about tension between city and country came to the fore at the La Villette competition, not only in relation to our project, but the projects of Cedric Price, Jean Nouvel and Bernard Tschumi as well. Since then they have been confirmed, especially in Asian cities, not only for these positive reasons, but for less admissible reasons too, because landscape is less expensive and politically correct. So the 20th century is drawing to a close with the death of town planning and with this highly cynical apotheosis of landscape. Yves was a molecule in this field with its bipolar tension between city and country. He foreshadowed this shift.

Bordeaux, March 1996

I, Michel Corajoud, is a landscape architect who teaches at the National School of Landscape Architecture in Versailles.

Odile Fillon is a journalist and film maker.

"This interview was originally published in the catalog of the exhibition Yves Brunier: Landscape Architect, reproduced here with the permission of arc en rêve.



Illustrations:

1. Autoroutes du Sud de la France, White poplar/Shadowberry trees/Concrete dunes.
2. Day, French Garden, Tulle: evergreen plane-tree leaves + white flowers-Star shaped concrete pathway-Airport beacon lighting.
3. Museumpark, reflecting wall, 1994.
4. Evian-les-Bains, Playground 1: the chessboard, Playground 2: the flying saucer.
5. Max Ernst, The Garden of France, 1962 (Le Jardin de la France, oil on canvas, 114 x 168 cm, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).
6. Museumpark, July 1994.
7. Tours, Plagnola greenhouse, glass pavilions.
8. European Patent Office, Micro climate garden.
9. Museumpark, the white orchard on white sand and the reflecting wall.
10. Haarlemmermeer, Amsterdam, 1986.
11. Melun-Sénart greenhouse models: Autumn and sunlight, Autumn: yellowing tulip beds bring out the different nuances of the grove; Winter: A burst of willow and dogwood bordering the spring.
12. Haarlemmermeer, Amsterdam, 1986.
13. European Patent Office, Sports garden.
14. Unbuilt drawing.

Cover: Museumpark: the white orchard on white sand and the reflecting wall.
Back Cover: Waterloo: emerging from a well-tiled plan, monuments commemorate different episodes of the battle like so many miniature baroque gardens.



YVES BRUNIER

Born on 10.11.1963 in Evian-les-Bains, Haute-Savoie, France.
Died on 2.10.1991 in Evian-les-Bains.

Architectural School in Grenoble (1980-1982).
Diplôme in landscape architecture, Architectural College of Landscape Studies (Ecole nationale supérieure du paysage), Versailles (1984).
Thesis: 2000 hectares at Melun-Sénart "But what did I do to them?"
Cergy-Pontoise summer university (1985).

Projects assistant to Rem Koolhaas—OMA Rotterdam:

1984
Oosterdok, Amsterdam
Bijlmermeer, Amsterdam
Scenics, Rotterdam
Haarlemmermeer, The Hague
Haarlemmermeer, Amsterdam
1987
Melun-Sénart, competition for the urban redevelopment of the new town.

Projects assistant to Jean Nouvel, Paris:

1987
Tourism Institute, Marne-la-Vallée, competition.
Fondation Cartier, Domaine du Montcal, Jussy-en-Joux.
Environmental impact assessment of wood clearance management, Fondation Cartier.
Garden of the Saint-James hotel and restaurant, Boulevard.
Villa Boulebas garden, Paris.
European Tower, J. Nouvel, V. Aloup, M. Fukas, G. Staudel.
France-Japan symbol, Tokyo, competition.
1989
Autoroutes du Sud de la France (Southern Motorways), Vienne.
East Val d'Osse, Roissy, competition.
CLM-BDO, Paris.

Association with Isabelle Auricoste, office in Fontenay sous Bois, 1988-1991.

1988
Garden of the Department of the Vendée Office Building, La Roche-sur-Yon, competition.
Public garden, Zee Brugghe, Paris, competition.
Technoscape "Vanne Vane", Paris, competition.
Waterloo site development, competition.

1989
Museumpark, Rotterdam (in collaboration with OMA-Rem Koolhaas).
Villa Ouf'Ans, Saint-Coud (in collaboration with OMA-Rem Koolhaas).
Nursery school garden, Evian-les-Bains.
Château la Gaffelière, Saint-Étienne.
Château Pompy, Saint-Étienne.
Domaine La Prunelle, Paris-La Couronne.
Château Tour de l'Est, Saint-Eulalie.
Domaine du Chevalier, Lézignan.
Vieux Château Certan, Pomerol.
Saint-Quentin, competition, Villeneuve d'Ascq.
Place du Général Leclerc, Tours (in collaboration with Jean Nouvel).
Masterplan competition, Rotterdam (in collaboration with Jean Nouvel).
Euralille, Lille (in collaboration with OMA-Rem Koolhaas).
International Lecture Center competition, Paris (in collaboration with Michel Bourdieu).

1990
European Patents Office, The Hague (in collaboration with Willem Jan Neutelings & Frank Koolhaas).
Development of the banks of the river Vézère, Rannes (in collaboration with Dominique Abba).
Page Blau, Valenton (in collaboration with Eva Samuël).

1991
Development of the banks of the river Adour, Dax (in collaboration with Jean Nouvel).
Hotel des Thermes, Dax (in collaboration with Jean Nouvel).
Garden of the house N. Brassehaert (in collaboration with Willem Jan Neutelings).
Garden of the house B. Brassehaert (in collaboration with Stéphane Boël).
Garden of the house S.N. Brassehaert (in collaboration with Xavier de Ceyter).



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